

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 9



THE SAD STATE OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Scripture Text: Acts 25:1-24

For two years Paul had been held in the prison at Caesarea. Now a new governor had come in. Would he give Paul freedom?

Israel was a corrupt nation. How far they had fallen from God's plan, hypocritically turning the forces of religion from lifting men to God to dragging them down to hell! Into such conditions the sinless, loving Jesus had come to redeem man from them. Looking at our lesson today, we see the great love of God. We also see the sinfulness of sin. We see the danger of falling from even the highest place. We see the need of constant prayer and watching to keep our hearts set on God and obedient to His Word.

MEMORY VERSE: *I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.*

—*Psalm 91:2*

DAILY READINGS:

- Mon.—**Psalm 89:19-37** The Rock of our salvation.
- Tue.—**Romans 9:14-29** God's righteousness and mercy.
- Wed.—**2 Timothy 3** God's Word for perilous times.
- Thu.—**Hebrews 6:9-20** Hope is an anchor for the saints.
- Fri.—**1 John 3:1-13** Difference between saints and sinners.

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 11:15 Can be deceived.

Festus Hears Paul's Case

Acts 25:1-8 Festus began his governorship with a trip to Jerusalem. **The high priest and the chief of the Jews**, constantly watching for opportunity to carry out their wicked plans against Paul, hurried to him with their stories of Paul's crimes. (The devil never sleeps nor goes on vacation.) They **besought him** to send for Paul to be brought to Jerusalem. But their intentions were that he should never reach there. They would waylay him and kill him. The plan failed. Festus was soon returning to Caesarea and asked them to go with him there to accuse Paul. This they did.

The day after Festus reached Caesarea, the hearing was held. Festus sat on the judgment seat, the accusing Jews stood around, and Paul was before them. The Jews **laid many and grievous complaints against Paul**. It would seem Paul was a wicked criminal, EXCEPT that they had no proof of the charges. Paul denied any offense **against the law, or against the temple, or against Caesar**.

The State of the Priesthood

At Jerusalem the high priest quickly sought through Festus a new opportunity to kill Paul. Two years he had held this murder in his heart. Yet he sat in the sacred office of high priest, the anointed of God. He wore the holy garments and the crown with the inscription, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. He bore the names of the children of Israel upon his heart when he entered the holy place to offer sacrifices as symbols of Christ's sacrifice for sin. Once a year he entered, where no other was allowed to go, into the holy of holies where God dwelt above the mercy seat, there to make atonement for Israel's sins. Still, this high priest could stoop to try to kill Paul. He was

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not alone in his hatred. The multitude of the Jews cried that Paul ought not to live. God's literal nation had become corrupt and had fallen far from God's plan. They were pulling people down who they had been sent to lift up to God. We see much of this in religion today. The only remedy is a greater fear of God in the ministry as well as in the laity.

Paul Appeals to Caesar

Acts 25:9-12 Festus, not knowing the case very well, and **willing to do the Jews a pleasure**, asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem to be judged. Paul, tired of the waiting, in despair of justice here, and knowing he would meet even less fairness at Jerusalem, made a quick decision. He would go to the highest court of the land. He appealed to Caesar, the emperor. After consulting with the council, Festus answered, **unto Caesar shalt thou go.**

Festus Reveals Ignorance

Acts 25:13-21 While Paul waited for a ship to take him to Rome, King Agrippa and Bernice came to make a formal visit to the new governor at Caesarea. One day Festus told the king of Paul, describing the case as he knew it. He said the accusations he had heard were not of the kind he had expected. No doubt he thought Paul would be charged with criminal acts. Instead, the chief complaints seemed to be in the realm of thought—of opinions and beliefs. He said they were **questions . . . of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.** Here Festus revealed his ignorance of the Jews' religion and of Jesus Christ. He assumed Jesus to be dead because He had died. He assumed Paul's statement of Jesus' Resurrection to be false. He assumed these doctrines to be mere human notions of a small group—only **their own superstition**—rather than universal, divine Truths.

The Worldly Mind

When Festus saw the religious questions of Paul's case as of small matter, taking for granted that the unbelievers' statements were true and the Christian's false, he was but acting naturally. **The natural (unregenerate) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him (1 Corinthians 2:14).** This natural mind is what the Christian worker is dealing with in presenting the Gospel to the lost. It should be no wonder to him when they fail to grasp spiritual Truths that are clear to him. He was once the same. Only when conviction brings repentance, repentance, belief, and belief, the new birth, are the spiritual eyes opened and the mind inclined toward belief.

Agrippa Desires to Hear Paul

Acts 25:22-24 Agrippa said . . . **I would also hear the man myself.** He wished to examine this case for himself. This was more than curiosity. He seemed to feel a need to learn more of this One **whom Paul affirmed to be alive.** The next day the hearing was set. King Agrippa and Bernice came **with great pomp**, probably dressed in their royal robes and decorations, brought in with much ceremony, and seated in the most honored seats. Festus sat with them. **The chief captains and principal men of the city** sat near. Then **Paul was brought forth**, a prisoner in chains, led by a soldier. There we shall leave him until our next lesson.

Paul was a man of action. To be held behind prison walls with so much work undone was hard for him. But God could use this waiting time. It gave Paul physical rest. But all the time his feet were at rest, his mind was active, running along the paths of Truth, exploring new pearls there. Surely, his later epistles are richer for these two years of preparation. Notice the spiritual depths and heights of Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Yes, God has use for adversities to bless those able to bear them without casting away their confidence. God can use afflictions to enrich the soul of the saint who holds true to Him.